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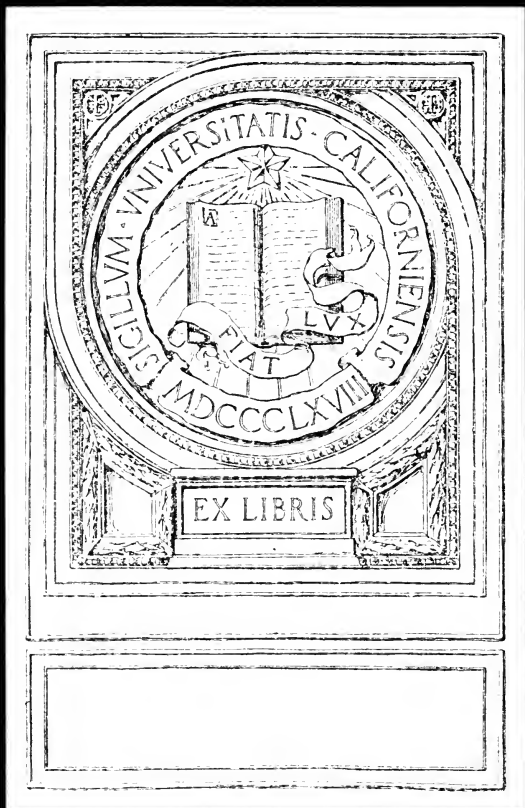
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BRIDGES

By
CLARE KUMMER



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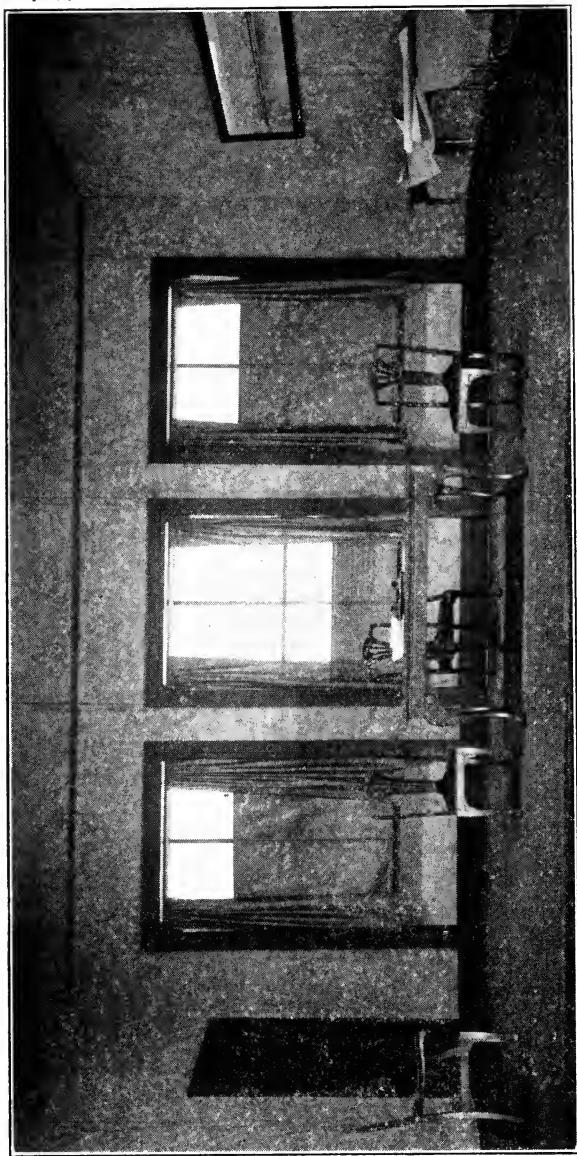
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Stage of Punch and Judy Theatre, New York, set for "BRIDGES"

CHARACTERS

PENFIELD PARKER, JR.—
Of Parker and Son, Bridge Builders.
 WALLIE BREEN.....*His friend, also in the office.*
 ENID BIRDSALL—
The girl who wants to have a bridge built.

Originally produced at the Punch and Judy Theatre, New York, February 13, 1921, with the following cast:

PENFIELD PARKER, JR.....*Sidney Blackmer*
 WALLIE BREEN..... *Roland Hogue*
 ENID BIRDSALL *Ruth Gillmore*



BRIDGES

SCENE: *The inner office of Parker and Son, on the eighteenth floor of an office building down town in New York City, facing the river. At the back a wide window looking out on the sky, which is deep blue, but changes to rosy sunset light during the scene. There is a door leading into the outer office R.U.E. On wall R. a picture of a suspension bridge. On wall L. a map of the United States. A large table with blue prints scattered about R.C. A smaller table down L. against the wall; on this table a walking stick and hat belonging to PENFIELD.*

TIME: *About five o'clock on a spring afternoon.*

ON RISE: PENFIELD and WALLIE discovered. *They are in the midst of a heated discussion. The rest of the office force has gone. The large table separates the arguing pair.*

PENFIELD. *(Down L. of table, not looking at WALLIE)* What's the matter with artists?

WALLIE. *(Above table)* I don't know what's the matter with them. They're all right, I suppose.

PENFIELD. I should say they are all right—and I'm going to be one. I can paint, can't I?

WALLIE. (*Grudgingly*) I suppose so.

PENFIELD. I know I can paint.

WALLIE. I know you can build bridges. That's your inheritance.

PENFIELD. A fine inheritance. Bridges to build!

WALLIE. Well, why not do both?

PENFIELD. (*With scorn*) Did you say both?

WALLIE. I did—I said both—why not do both?

PENFIELD. Did anyone ever do "both"? Doesn't everybody know that doing "both" is responsible for all the failures in the world? Don't you have to concentrate—to succeed?

WALLIE. Well—can't you concentrate on both?

PENFIELD. How can you do two things at once?

WALLIE. It's perfectly easy—sometimes I do three things at once.

PENFIELD. I'm not speaking of you—who ever did "both" that amounted to anything?

WALLIE. Well—I'm sure there have been people—only you get me so excited I can't think of them.

PENFIELD. Well, who? Who?

WALLIE. (*Brightening*) I've thought of one—he was just what you are too, Pen—an architect—and he broke loose and did something else—Ruskin. John Ruskin.

PENFIELD. Nothing to do with the case. Ruskin was a writer—pure and simple.

WALLIE. Well, I don't know how pure and simple he was—but I know he did two things at once—and did 'em darned well.

PENFIELD. I don't want to be an architect—I don't like anything about it—I don't like blue prints. (*Taking one up.*) I hate the color of 'em. Isn't that horrible—that blue is positively profane—I don't like measuring things. I don't like to think about

arches and rivets. I want to paint—that requires a man's life. I'm perfectly willing to give mine.

WALLIE. And incidentally your father's.

PENFIELD. You don't think it's going to kill the old man, do you, if I leave the office.

WALLIE. It might. (*Picking up long envelope and document attached.*) If your father knew you'd got the commission to build this bridge and thrown it down, I think it would come pretty close to finishing him.

PENFIELD. Well, I won't let him know it. I'll just tear it up right now—give it to me.

WALLIE. (*Without giving up the envelope*) Why, Pen, it's tremendous—with all your father's done, he never had anything like this. It puts you right at the top, why a bridge like this—it'll be in all the geographies—it'll change the map of the world.

PENFIELD. The map of the world's all right. I wish people would let it alone.

WALLIE. And there's something so inspiring about it—a beautiful bridge, spanning a river—think what it might mean in war time—think of seeing an entire regiment marching across the bridge, in perfect step.

PENFIELD. The bridge falls down if they do that, you know.

WALLIE. Well—marching any old way as long as they get across. But what's the use—you're going to give it up and I might as well get out before I'm fired. (*Lays envelope on table.*)

PENFIELD. Fired? Why, they'll need you more than ever.

WALLIE. Who will? I don't believe there'll be any Parker and Son—anyway, your father only let me in because he thought it would please you. I'll never be anything in this business—I only love it, that's all.

PENFIELD. All? Why, that's the whole thing. That's why I expect to be a good painter, Wallie—because I love it.

WALLIE. I know—you can afford to expect things—I can't. When you paint your first sunset—that lets me out.

PENFIELD. I promise that you shall stay in this accursed place till you have a long gray beard, my dear fellow, if that's what you want.

WALLIE. Thanks, but——

PENFIELD. My first sunset—it's going to be one that I saw at Marblehead last summer—saffron and mauve—with the sky turquoise and some puffy clouds smudged in with your finger, lined with rose and gold. I don't know where the rose and gold came from, but there they were——

WALLIE. I wouldn't start in on a sunset like that if I were you—I'd try a quiet one.

PENFIELD. I shall start in on the noisiest sunset I can think of. I'll go forth to be a painter joyously, Wallie—with bells ringing and—— (*A table bell in the outer office rings.*) Hasn't everyone gone?

(*A knock on the door. ENID opens it.*)

ENID. I beg your pardon—is it all right for me to come in?

WALLIE. Certainly—come right in.

ENID. I thought perhaps I ought to wait out there until someone asked me who I wanted to see—but there was no one to ask me.

WALLIE. I should be out there—but, you see, I'm in here, quarrelling with the firm . . .

ENID. (*To PARKER*) Oh, are you the firm?

PENFIELD. I'm the "Son" part of it.

ENID. (*A little troubled*) My name is Birdsall—Enid Birdsall.

PENFIELD. Well—can we do anything about it?

WALLIE. Any relation to Rufus Birdsall?

PENFIELD. Excuse me. (*Introducing WALLIE*)
This is Mr. Breen.

ENID. How do you do. Yes, he was my great uncle.

WALLIE. How splendid?

ENID. (*Hesitating a little*) You mean—because he's left me all his money?

WALLIE. No, I didn't. That's splendid, too, but I meant we're sort of related—because he was in my great grandfather's class at college.

ENID. Really? I didn't know they had colleges then.

WALLIE. Oh, yes—they had colleges and campuses and everything. Yes, indeed—why, yes.

PENFIELD. (*Wishing to check the garrulous WALLIE.*) Pardon me for interrupting, but what did you want to see me about?

ENID. Well, it may be that I shouldn't have come at all—I mean I'm not sure that this is the sort of place where one asks about such things——

WALLIE. Why of course it is—you can ask about anything here.

PENFIELD. Just a moment, Wallie—what things, Miss—er——

ENID. Enid—Enid Birdsall. Was it all right for me to ring the bell out there? I saw it on the table and I—perhaps I shouldn't have rung it.

PENFIELD. Certainly, it was splendid—but that's not what you wanted to ask me about, is it?

ENID. No. Why—you see, I want to have a lot of things done, by reliable people, and Uncle Rufus talked so much about you—about—Parker—your father's name in Parker, isn't it?

PENFIELD. Yes—so is mine—as it happens.

ENID. Yes—Uncle Rufus said that everything

that Mr. Parker had anything to do with was so splendid——

PENFIELD. I hope he included me.

ENID. Your father built a suspension bridge when Uncle Rufus was in Congress—and that seemed to—endear your father to Uncle Rufus.

PENFIELD. It probably endeared your Uncle Rufus to my father.

ENID. I don't know why a suspension bridge should endear people to each other particularly——

WALLIE. They might have gone through a lot of suspense together.

PENFIELD. But you were saying——

ENID. Oh, yes—well—you see, I want to make five hundred acres up on the Hudson perfectly beautiful as a sort of memorial to uncle—and then I want to make about five acres beautiful, just a little way, for me to live on—myself. And one thing I especially want—is it all right for me to go on?

WALLIE. Go right on, it's fine.

PENFIELD. (*Offering chair*) Sit here, won't you?

ENID. (*Taking it*) Thank you. You see, there's a darling little island just a little way out in the river—with trees and rocks and everything that cats and birds and little animals love. I want to have it fixed up for my pets when they get old. You know pets don't like to be talked about—they don't like to have people say, "Poor old Fido, he must be nineteen, he really ought to be chloroformed" any more than we do. And they know, when people say those things—well, I want to separate them from people. So I thought of the island and having a darling little rustic bridge——

PENFIELD. Oh, a bridge.

WALLIE. I should say a landscape gardener is what you want.

PENFIELD. (*Giving him a severe look*) I build bridges, don't I?

ENID. Then we can really talk about it?

PENFIELD. Certainly. I'll get a piece of paper and you can describe the place to me. (*Goes to table for pad and pencil.*)

WALLIE. It seems queer to do all that for animals.

ENID. Does it? But animals are so wonderful.

WALLIE. I know, but—

ENID. Animals—are just as nice as they know how to be—but we're not—are we? I'm so sorry for them, that they have to be with us.

PENFIELD. (*Returning*) Now—what's the shape of the island? (*He sits on L. end of table.*)

ENID. It's sort of long at one end and round on the other and hilly in the middle.

PENFIELD. (*Sketching rapidly as she speaks*) Anything like that? (*Showing her what he is doing.*)

ENID. (*Delighted*) Precisely like that.

PENFIELD. You want some sort of a building for the old pets to live in, don't you?

ENID. Of course—and I want a lovely fountain—like an Italian fountain—with part of it sunk in the ground for them to drink out of. My idea is that they will become sort of wild—in a nice way—and that they'll prefer drinking under the trees, to having water-bowls in their house.

PENFIELD. (*Sketching*) I see.

WALLIE. Jungle stuff—all meet at the fountain at five.

ENID. Yes—the way they do in Kipling's books.

PENFIELD. Are these animals all friendly?

ENID. Oh, yes. The cats and the dogs and the birds—there's no trouble about that.

PENFIELD. But do you think they'll remain friendly? Living in this way?

ENID. Oh, yes—because they'll all sort of get wild together, you see.

PENFIELD. (*Showing sketch*) How's that?

ENID. (*Delighted*) Oh, how did you do it all in a minute—it's perfect. And that railing—it's just the kind of a one Gilbert loves to lie on—you're wonderful, Mr. Parker!

PENFIELD. (*Suspicious*) Gilbert?

ENID. He's the oldest cat.

WALLIE. (*Strolling down R.*) Are you going to have any pictures in the animal house? Because I know a very fine one of a sunset— It's not finished yet, but I think almost any cat that cared for a sunset would like it.

ENID. Pictures! Why, I don't want pictures in my own house . . .

PENFIELD. (*Looking up*) See if there isn't a book on Italian fountains in the library out there in the office, Wallie—will you?

WALLIE. Certainly—excuse me just a moment. (*Exit WALLIE.*)

PENFIELD. (*Seriously, laying down pad*) Tell me—why don't you like pictures?

ENID. Why, I just—don't like to have them around, do you? I mean if the wall is nice.

PENFIELD. But why?

ENID. They prevent me from seeing my own pictures, I guess. When life is wonderful—when real things are wonderful that we see ourselves—pictures are disturbing, don't you think so?

PENFIELD. (*Surprised*) Oh—disturbing!

ENID. Yes. That was the only trouble with Uncle Rufus. He collected pictures—they were everywhere. Strange people's grandfathers and grandmothers and artist's pictures of themselves and Madonnas and ballet-dancers and girls with oranges—and fish and vegetables—you couldn't get away from

them. One evening I remember I sat by the fire in the library. It had been such a wonderful day—and I was living it all over again. I looked up and my eyes rested on the picture of a large pumpkin. A perfect pumpkin—you could have taken it and cut it up and made it into a pie—only the trouble was no one had. Think of my beautiful reverie—interrupted by a pumpkin—uncle paid thousands of dollars for it.

PENFIELD. (*Disturbed*) But don't you like pictures of the sea—and sunsets?

ENID. Why, I've lived by the sea, through nearly all my summers. And my eyes when they're closed are full of sunsets.

PENFIELD. Strange, isn't it—when you came in—I was just talking of becoming an artist.

ENID. Oh, don't. That is—don't if you can help it.

PENFIELD. Because you don't like pictures?

ENID. Oh, no, not that—but people who paint and write and do those things—— Well, they're out of it—aren't they?

PENFIELD. Out of it?

ENID. Yes—I mean—they miss everything. While they're painting and writing—we're living. When they get through—if they ever do—it's too late. Or they're too tired. They must be—you can't do *both*—it's impossible.

PENFIELD. (*Looking at her curiously*) But you wouldn't have people stop—writing altogether, would you?

ENID. No—they have to, of course. And it isn't so annoying anyway—books don't stare at you like pictures.

PENFIELD. What a horrible idea—stare at you.

ENID. Yes—they do, don't they? Of course there are times when they might come in—if you had just

killed somebody and looked up and saw "Judith and the Dagger," it would be all right—or if you'd had fish for dinner and were thinking of it—and looked up and saw a large plate of mackerel and whatever goes with it, by—— Who was the wonderful fish man?

PENFIELD. Don't. I beg of you.

ENID. No—because I didn't come to talk about pictures—we're not getting on at all.

PENFIELD. (*Looking at her with interest*) Oh, I don't know——

ENID. About the plans, I mean.

PENFIELD. Oh—well you know it seems to me that before we can really get anywhere, I must see the place—actually see it. This is all—— (*Refers to sketch*) just what we've been talking about—"pictures." It doesn't mean anything—how do I know there is an island. I want to see it.

ENID. I hoped you would.

PENFIELD. When do you want to start the work on the bridge—and so on?

ENID. I thought in the fall. I'm going to be away—traveling this summer.

PENFIELD. Oh, that's too bad.

ENID. Is it? Why?

PENFIELD. Well, only that the best time to build bridges is in the spring—— They—er—well, they seem to thrive better, somehow.

ENID. Do they? Well, I don't have to go away—but could you do it this spring? You must be so busy—I don't like to ask you to build my bridge before you do anything else—because you must have such important ones to do.

PENFIELD. I haven't anything important—just one small commission that can wait. (*Picking up contract and laying it down again.*)

ENID. Well, when could you come? Would to-morrow morning be too soon?

PENFIELD. Why, no—I can't imagine anything sooner—better, I mean.

ENID. (*Taking card out of her bag*) Here's a time-table—and if you're not afraid, I'll meet you at the station.

PENFIELD. I'm afraid—but do it.

ENID. I say that because I'm just learning to drive my car.

PENFIELD. (*Anxious*) Don't without someone with you—promise me you won't—and I'll tell you—if you could only stay over until to-morrow, I could—that is, if you'd let me—I could drive you up in my car—

ENID. Oh, how splendid—but would it be all right? I mean I feel as if I ought to ask someone—and I haven't anyone to ask but you—do you really think it would be all right?

PENFIELD. I know it would. It would be magnificent.

ENID. You see, I'm all alone in the world—and when I say alone I really mean it. I've no one to be responsible to, but Margaret Hindley, my old nurse. She lives with me and I consult her about everything. It's wonderful because she's such respectable ideas and yet she always agrees with me, because she loves me so, you see.

PENFIELD. I see.

ENID. She's such a dear—and she's a little deaf, too. Would you mind if she went up with us, in the car?

PENFIELD. Mind? I should say not—from your description she must be altogether delightful. (*They go to window, where the glow of the sunset is deepening.*)

ENID. (*Seeing the sky out the window*) Oh, what a beautiful sky. What a wonderful sunset!

PENFIELD. Isn't it—now, honestly, wouldn't you like to have a picture of it?

ENID. But I have it!

(*Enter WALLIE. They do not notice him.*)

ENID. (*Looking out of window*) Oh, look—it's changing—it's getting pinker!

PENFIELD. (*Watching her*) Beautiful!

(*WALLIE exits, rings bell in outer office and enters again.*)

WALLIE. Well—I found a book on Italian fountains of the time of Benvenuto Cellini.

PENFIELD. Couldn't you find something a little earlier—or a little later?

WALLIE. I might.

ENID. (*To PENFIELD*) But I must go—really I must. I think it's just wonderful of you to do this for me. But I do think it's important to have bridges built right, don't you? Even if they're only little ones.

PENFIELD. Oh, most important.

ENID. Big bridges are splendid with trains rushing over them and ships sailing under them—but little rustic bridges are—sweeter, don't you think so, Mr. Breen?

WALLIE. Sweeter—oh, yes, yes—undoubtedly—and then yours—with all the animals going over to the Old Ladies Home—— Why, that's going to be a very affecting spectacle.

ENID. (*To PENFIELD*) Good-bye—until to-morrow. You will hear from me the very first thing in the morning—we must let Margaret decide it, of course—but I'm sure she'll say yes.

PENFIELD. When shall I call for you?

ENID. About seven o'clock?

PENFIELD. And where?

ENID. At the St. Regis.

PENFIELD. All right—I'll be there.

WALLIE. (*To PENFIELD, aside*) You'll be in bed.

PENFIELD. In case I should be detained, you might call up my house. (*Gives her card.*)

ENID. Thank you—good-bye. I shouldn't have said all those things about pictures.

PENFIELD. I'm so glad you did.

ENID. Good-bye.

EXIT ENID.

WALLIE. (*Returning to the original argument*) Well—are you going to build the bridge?

PENFIELD. (*Ecstatically*) Wallie, I'm going to build such a bridge as was never seen before—I'm going to have roses on the bank where the bridge takes off—those climbing, spreading, rambling roses. They will reach out to the bridge and they'll climb all the way across it—it will be actually a bridge of roses——

WALLIE. Then what will you do?

PENFIELD. I'll go and stand on it.

WARNING.

WALLIE. That's not what the specifications call for—I should think it would look funny all covered with those things.

PENFIELD. What bridge are you talking about?

WALLIE. The bridge for the Government.

PENFIELD. Oh—I'm not going to touch that until fall——

WALLIE. (*Delighted*) But you will do it then? Hurrah!

PENFIELD. (*Thoughtfully*) After all, Wallie, there is something wonderful about bridges. (*The bell rings—the door opens—ENID enters.*)

ENID. (*Hesitatingly*) Why, the elevators have stopped running—and I want to ask—is it many flights down?

PENFIELD. Only eighteen. (*He crosses to table L., takes his hat and stick, returns to ENID, holds the door open for her.*) Allow me! (*Exit ENID, followed by PENFIELD. WALLIE looks after them with a benign smile.*)

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